

**MANSFIELD DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP  
PLANNING AND DESIGN COMMITTEE  
Mansfield Downtown Partnership Office  
1244 Storrs Road**

**Wednesday, December 15, 2010**

**MINUTES**

Members: Steve Bacon, Jon Hand, Chris Kueffner, Frank McNabb, Peter Millman, Ruth Moynihan, and Betsy Paterson

Staff: Cynthia van Zelm and Kathleen Paterson

Guests: Geoff Fitzgerald (BL Companies); Andy Graves (BL Companies); Lou Marquet (LeylandAlliance); Greg Padick (Town Director of Planning); Alexandria Roe (Partnership Board); and Macon Toledano (LeylandAlliance)

**1. Call to Order**

Steve Bacon called the meeting to order at 5:08 pm.

**2. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**3. Review of Preliminary Plans for Phases 1A and 1B**

Mr. Bacon reviewed the previous meeting with the Committee. He stated his understanding was that the development team had made changes to the plans based on the Committee's feedback.

Geoff Fitzgerald explained that some minor changes had been made to the site plan to make sure that the plans fit the zoning guidelines. He said that BL Companies is waiting on the Dog Lane design and is preparing for the 90% review by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT). He noted that the plans are still in progress.

Chris Kueffner asked about the status of the zoning change.

Macon Toledano explained that the team had decided to reduce DL-1 by one floor to conform to the regulations for the PB-2 zoning guidelines. Mr. Toledano then explained that the building had to be shifted to fit on the property line.

Mr. Fitzgerald clarified that the request to the Town of Mansfield Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) was not for a zoning change but for a special permit modification to the DL-1 building.

Mr. Toledano added that the change in the building height was a response to two things. First, the change is part of a response to the Committee's feedback on the composition of the façades. Second, the decision was a response to the comments made by PZC members at the public hearing on December 1 regarding the building height.

Betsy Paterson asked if the change affected the number of apartments in DL-1.

Mr. Toledano replied that the change eliminates two units. He added that the change reinforced the vision for the Town Square area as laid out in the Storrs Center Special Design District (SC: SDD). He said that the buildings are not designed for the maximum height allowed by the SC: SDD (85 feet). He explained that the buildings are proposed to have five stories and the average height will be 70 feet.

Ruth Moynihan inquired about the depth of the buildings.

Andy Graves responded that the buildings are 60 feet deep in most areas but closer to 70 feet in DL-2 when the overhang is included.

Mr. Fitzgerald shared a new rendering with the Committee and explained the perspective of the image. He noted that the artist took some creative license in depicting the streetscape. For instance, not all of the planned street trees were included so that more of the building could be viewed.

Ms. Moynihan asked what types of trees will be used.

Cynthia van Zelm noted that the SC: SDD guidelines dictate what types of trees may be planted.

Peter Millman commented that he thought the team had done a terrific job of making the first floor inviting and that, in his view, the first two or three floors have a greater impact on the pedestrian experience than the height of the building does.

Ms. Paterson asked about the height of the Buckley dorm.

Greg Padick replied that Buckley is seven stories tall.

Jon Hand said he liked seeing the tower detail but wondered if it was really tall enough to call a "tower." He also liked the idea of the different heights.

Ms. Paterson agreed and said she thought it created more of a vista.

Mr. Bacon asked about the number of crosswalks on Dog Lane, about the width of Dog Lane near the parking garage, and whether additional crosswalks would be needed.

Mr. Fitzgerald explained that Dog Lane will be about 22 feet wide, which he believes to be crossable. He said that the crosswalk requested by Frank McNabb in a previous meeting had not yet been added to the drawing but would be included in final plans.

After some discussion, the Committee agreed by general consensus that they would like to see another crosswalk added to Dog Lane in the area near the parking garage.

Mr. Bacon asked about the composition of the crosswalks.

Mr. Fitzgerald responded that the crosswalks would be a contrasting color. He added that he would like to see a raised crosswalk on Dog Lane.

Mr. Hand thought that a raised crosswalk would not be a problem because Dog Lane already features speed bumps farther west.

Mr. Toledano reviewed the revised elevations with the Committee. He noted that they are still working on the plans and that the current focus is to break up the façades more, as the Committee had recommended.

Mr. Padick inquired about the building materials.

Mr. Graves reviewed the materials that would be used, including cast stone, clapboard, thin brick, and wood trim. He offered to bring samples of the cast stone to the next meeting and referred the Committee to the original design board for the DL-1 building.

Mr. Toledano referred the Committee to the SC: SDD and reviewed the discussion of the Town Square on page 16 of the SC: SDD guidelines. He commented that the design is intended to create the Town Square as described in the SC: SDD.

Mr. Graves reviewed the revised elevations for TS-1. He said that CL&P is requiring individual meters for each apartment at ground level. Mr. Graves explained that, to accommodate this requirement, banks of meters will be added to the back of TS-1 but that they will be built into cabinets that are accessible but still tasteful.

Ms. Moynihan expressed concern with the location of a convenience store in TS-1.

Mr. Toledano explained that the convenience store was listed as an example and that no plans have been finalized for such a use. He said they will continue to pursue tenants and will keep it in mind.

Mr. Kueffner expressed his preference that the elevators should be less dominant and that the stairs should be more readily accessed to encourage the use of the stairs rather than the elevators.

Mr. Graves explained that the elevators to be used are a newer type called “echo space elevators” and that they use about a third less energy than typical models. He added that changes to the stairs are still possible and noted that the drawing – which is a work in progress – does not yet show the windows planned for the stairwell.

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that, according to building code, the stairwell has to lead directly outside.

Mr. Toledano added that accounting for fire egress issues dictates design to some extent.

Mr. Millman asked if glass could be added to the back wall of the stairwell, too. He referenced the biology building at UConn and commented that the design of the main stairwell in that building was very well done.

Ms. Moynihan suggested that a medical clinic be included on the first floor.

Ms. van Zelm said that such a use is under consideration and that the development team has been approached by several people who are interested in the project.

Mr. Toledano pointed out the locations of the stairs and the elevators on the upper floors and noted that the stairs are more prominent on those levels.

Ms. Moynihan asked if the apartments could be reconfigured so that they are all on the south side of the building. She said she was worried that some apartments would not receive enough sunlight in the current design.

Mr. Marquet responded that doing so would result in a much narrower building and would increase building costs by about 25% or more.

Mr. Graves added that the building would have to be twice as long.

Mr. Moynihan expressed concern with the location of the three bedroom apartments over the Vanilla Bean Café space and commented that families would not want to live above the restaurant.

Mr. Graves explained that there will be a seven-inch concrete slab between the residential and commercial uses.

Ms. Moynihan reiterated her concern regarding the number of bathrooms in each apartment.

Mr. Millman discussed the different types of units available at Freedom Green, as a local example, and the typical number of bathrooms and bedrooms.

Mr. Graves reminded the Committee that, in addition to tailoring the design to fit the design guidelines and the building codes, he also is trying to accommodate two clients and that decisions on the number of bedrooms and bathrooms is market-driven.

Alex Roe recommended that the team continue to work on the elevations and expressed particular concern for the design of the side of TS-1 that motorists traveling south from campus will see first.

Mr. Hand expressed his preference for the look of the east elevation.

Mr. Bacon agreed with Ms. Roe regarding the elevation facing campus and its role as the first impression of the downtown area.

Mr. Millman reminded the Committee that these buildings will be viewed within the context of the Shippee building.

Mr. Toledano explained the process of finalizing the windows and walls and the layout of the interiors, then the façades of the fronts, and the current focus on the ends.

Mr. Hand said he was pleased with the changes to the long expanse of TS-1 and then asked about the rooflines.

Mr. Graves explained the building code and the limitations those regulations place on the design. He said that the goal is to create variation in the rooflines while conforming to the building code.

Mr. Marquet commented that he would like to work with UConn on improving the landscaping in the back of Phase 1A.

Ms. Roe said she would be more than happy to work with Mr. Marquet on landscaping. She then asked about the colors of the buildings and expressed concern regarding painting effects.

Mr. Graves replied that paint should never be the solution for a design problem and that the goal is to have the structure of the building stand on its own merit. Mr. Graves then reviewed the plans for DL-1 and DL-2.

Mr. Millman asked whether there would be a building over the new Storrs Automotive building.

Mr. Graves answered that the Storrs Automotive building would be a single story. He then said that the decrease in the height of DL-1 necessitated changes to the residential floors. Mr. Graves explained that the building code requires that within 75 feet, there must be two means of egress. He pointed out that with the shorter building, he could not keep the stairwell where it had been originally because that would lead to no where on the fifth floor. He explained the solution was to add another hallway that serves as a second point of egress.

Mr. Toledano explained that the solution may not be ideal from a design perspective but that it fits the building code requirements. He then noted that the decrease in the height of DL-1 by one floor has a positive impact on the façade of the building by adding even more variance in the rooflines.

Mr. Graves noted that, because he was still working on the back façade of DL-1 and DL-2, the drawings were not complete. He explained that he would like to have a tower at the end of DL-1 to cap the building.

Mr. Millman said that he recognized that many of the changes had been made in response to the Committee's comments and that it would be impossible to please every person's tastes but that he felt the design may be getting too articulated at the end of DL-1.

Mr. Kueffner said that he had to disagree with Mr. Millman and that he liked the current design for DL-1.

Mr. Toledano commented that there had been a lot of internal debate on the subject.

Mr. Bacon said that it might look better as one travels up Dog Lane to have the shorter end of the building closest to Storrs Automotive, which as noted earlier will be a single story.

Ms. Roe asked about the material planned for the columns of DL-2.

Mr. Graves explained that they would be made of a reinforced fiberglass.

Mr. Marquet added they would look like wood.

A general discussion of the design of the tower piece for DL-2 commenced with the general consensus being that work remained on that corner.

Mr. Kueffner expressed concern that the cupola on top of Storrs Automotive appeared too large.

Mr. Graves explained that, in his experience, when cupolas are designed to appear proportional on the plans, in reality they look too small. He said that he prefers to design the cupola about 25% larger so that once it is built and viewed from a distance, it looks proportional.

Ms. Moynihan asked about the ceiling heights in the apartments.

Mr. Graves said that they are 9 feet in the front and 8 feet in the back where the kitchen and bathrooms are.

Ms. Roe inquired as to the intention for TS-2 in regards to the number of tenants.

Mr. Marquet explained that the tenanting of TS-2 is still in progress so the space has been designed to be flexible.

Mr. Graves reviewed the residential levels and the green roof and noted that they are still discussing with the Mansfield Fire Marshal what is permitted for the roof.

Mr. Millman wondered if some of the units could be moved to the back of the building.

Mr. Graves said they tried that idea but that it made the access through the interior very awkward.

The Committee expressed general concern for the appearance of the garage wall from the interior spaces.

Mr. Marquet acknowledged their concerns and explained some of the options being explored. He then said that there had been some changes to the garage itself because they had a chance to meet with the design firm selected by the Town. The changes recommended by the design firm were to improve how the garage functioned.

Mr. Millman said that he felt that overall, the team had been very careful in crafting a pleasant pedestrian experience; however, he was concerned that the pedestrian access from the garage to DL-1 had not received the same attention.

Mr. Toledano said the goal is to direct people through the intermodal center, but he agreed with Mr. Millman that the pathway on the northeast side of the garage should be addressed. He added that the grant from the Federal Transit Administration may cover that piece.

Ms. van Zelm reminded the Committee that they will be reviewing the design of the streets once they are prepared, as they will each phase of the project.

Ms. Roe expressed concern regarding the rooflines all around the Town Square area and encouraged the team to continue to work on that piece.

Mr. Kueffner asked if the design of the roof on the left side of TS-2 was final or if it could be adjusted. He said that he did not have a specific solution to suggest but was not totally comfortable with the design shown.

Mr. Graves said that the design is not final and that he will continue to work on it. He added that he and Mr. Toledano had been working on that roofline but had not yet found a satisfactory solution.

Mr. McNabb inquired about the plans for radon protection and recommended a type of barrier film that he has found to be productive.

Mr. McNabb and Mr. Marquet discussed the merits of barrier films versus an under-slab venting system.

Mr. McNabb also asked whether the windows will be Low E, about plans for preventing condensation problems, about controlling noise levels, and about the type of doors that will be used in the interior spaces.

Mr. Graves said that there is a new product on the market that they are considering for the interior doors but that they have not decided yet. He noted that all doors leading to the corridor will adhere to the Fire Code.

Mr. Marquet said that the preference is for a solid core door, but that the material had not been determined yet.

Mr. Toledano referred the Committee to the Sustainability Guidelines for requirements regarding Mr. McNabb's other questions.

Mr. McNabb asked if there would be any attic space.

Mr. Graves responded that there would be but that it would be mostly limited to housing mechanical equipment.

Ms. Moynihan expressed her concern about the amount of water needed for the project.

Mr. Graves explained that the Sustainability Guidelines will be followed in regards to water usage and reminded the Committee that the Guidelines call for water efficiency at 30% better than current EPA guidelines.

Mr. Millman expressed his appreciation of the work completed thus far on the design. He added that he does not expect any design can please all tastes but that he thinks the plans look wonderful so far. He raised a concern regarding the planned asymmetry of the façade of TS-2 facing Bolton Road. He said he would prefer something more symmetrical.

Mr. Marquet recounted that he felt the same as Mr. Millman when he first viewed the drawings but that he has since changed his mind. He referenced examples in Lowell, Mass., and Waterbury, Conn. where quirky buildings have become the featured properties.

Mr. Graves said that particular façade had been debated internally.

Ms. Paterson commented that many older downtowns that have evolved over generations of renovating and revitalizing result in asymmetrical buildings. She said she thinks it adds to the character of a community and creates a "sense of place" and referenced towns in Maine.

Mr. Toledano said they can continue to work on this design.

#### **4. Approval of Minutes from November 16, 2010.**

Ms. Paterson moved to approve the Minutes from November 16, 2010 as presented.

Mr. Kueffner seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

#### **5. Topics for next Meeting and Set Meeting Date**

Mr. Bacon said he thought that the design plans had progressed well but that work remained. He asked Ms. van Zelm and Mr. Padick for a review of the next steps, which they provided.

After some discussion, the Committee decided by general consensus the following plan: Mr. Toledano and his team will continue to work on the design with the Committee's feedback in mind. At Mr. Padick's suggestion, they will maintain a list of any changes made following the December 15 meeting for the Committee's reference. Copies of the plans will be available for the Committee members to review at their convenience in the Partnership office. The next Committee meeting will be Tuesday, January 25, 2011, unless members feel that a special meeting is warranted.

#### **6. Adjourn**

Mr. Kueffner moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Millman seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

*Minutes prepared by Kathleen M. Paterson*